

Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey
Weekly Witness | November 9, 2017

The parable of the bridesmaids is set in the context of Matthew's gospel depiction of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. His view of the eschaton encapsulates the ideals of God's reign, against which we judge our efforts to live in the meantime (though, perhaps it feels more like "mean time" some days). In the midst of this living we are called to make decisions according to God's principles--a vision of God's ultimate justice and peace, without which our world would be bleak. (For more commentary on this parable, read the commentary written by [Susan Hysten](#) on the Luther Seminary "Preach this Week" blog.)

This past week we as a nation experienced the aftermath of another mass shooting, news that our sister and brothers in Puerto Rico remain in considerable distress without power and clean water, and painful discussions in Washington, DC. In a new bill, low-income and moderate-income neighbors will be asked to pay for tax cuts that benefit corporations and the wealthy, even while aid to those most vulnerable in our nation will be reduced. During this "mean time," how do we live according to God's principles for justice and peace?

As the people of God and advocates for justice, the first thing we need to do is pray. Bishop Stokes of the Diocese of New Jersey wrote this reflection this week about our need for prayer:

Prayer is not an offering of vague good wishes, "our thoughts and prayers" are with those who mourn. Nor is it a spiritual exercise that, successfully completed, exempts one from focusing on urgent issues of common concern and God's will. Prayer is not a dodge. In prayer we examine our own hearts and our own deeds to determine whether we are complicit in the evils we deplore. And if we are, we resolve to take action; we resolve to amend our lives . . . One does not offer prayers in lieu of demonstrating political courage, but rather in preparation.

It is important that we pray for those affected by violence, hardship and evil. In the meantime we are also called to act! Following discerning prayer, we move into advocacy. Here are a few ways to take the next steps into advocacy:

- Call your representatives in Washington and let them know that you support the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps). Visit [SNAP Feeds New Jersey Campaign](#) to learn how you can organize in your community.
- Review Bread for the World's new report on tax policy and hunger [here](#). Use this [link](#) to contact your member of Congress to let them know that tax policies must be fair and promote all the citizenry.
- The following bills are before Congress regarding gun violence. Read more and then call your representatives to encourage them to support them.
 1. Bump Stock Legislation (H.R. 3999, Curbelo/Moulton) seeks to amend Title 18, United States Code, to prohibit the manufacture, possession, or transfer of any part or combination of parts that is designed and functions to increase the rate of fire of a semiautomatic rifle but does not convert the semiautomatic rifle into a machinegun, and for other purposes. Twenty-five members of the House have signed on to co-sponsor the legislation, including New Jersey Rep. Lance and Rep. Smith. Please call *your* representative and ask them to be a co-sponsor of this bill.
 2. The Automatic Gunfire Prevention Act (H.R. 3947/S.1916, Cicilline/Feinstein) has 173 co-sponsors in the House (6 are from NJ) and 38 co-sponsors in the Senate, including both Senators Menendez and Booker. Please thank them for the support of this bill.
 3. The Background Check Completion Act (S.1923/H.3464, Blumenthal/Clyburn) is the only current bill regarding background checks. The Act has been referred to the Committee on the Judiciary (in the Senate) and the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations (in the House). It has 22 co-sponsors in the Senate and 24 co-sponsors in the House. Both NJ Senators are co-sponsors, however there are no NJ co-sponsors on the House side. You know what to do -- call your representatives to encourage them to co-sponsor this act!